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**How Does it End?**  
**by Senator Larry Craig**

As Christmas drew near and the first session of the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress wrapped up, I was reminded of a good, old fashioned cliffhanger. Many of us in Congress wondered how it would end. Now, we can clearly see that it ended with a bunch of loose ends, waiting to be tied. So when the second session of the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress begins, there will be much to do. I have put together a short list of a few things I will be focusing on in the weeks and months to come.

Several weeks ago, I wrote that one of the first things the Senate will vote on when the session starts will be the nomination of Judge Samuel Alito to the United States Supreme Court. I have met with Judge Alito several times now, and believe he has a great judicial temperament and personality. That being said, I will wait for the Senate Judiciary Committee to examine Judge Alito before I make a decision about whether I will or won't support his nomination. I want to allow the process to move forward before doing so, but at this point, I have seen nothing that suggests he will be anything but an outstanding Supreme Court justice.

Speaking of federal judges, two Idahoans have been nominated to fill vacancies on the 9<sup>th</sup> U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. Bill Myers and Randy Smith are two very able Idahoans whom President Bush has nominated, and I will work with members of the Judiciary Committee and in the full Senate to get each of these gentlemen an up-or-down vote, as they deserve.

Soon after the Alito vote, the Senate will likely have to vote on reauthorization of the Patriot Act. As you may know by now, I have been working with my colleagues in the Senate to include in the reauthorization more safeguards for civil liberties. The Patriot Act contains vital tools for law enforcement as they fight the war on terrorism, and those tools should not expire. However, when a law will be on the books for decades, spanning Presidents and generations, we can't make assumptions that everyone will act with the integrity of the Bush Administration. We need to make sure we get it right.

Another issue that the Senate Majority Leader expects to address early in the year is immigration reform. We absolutely must get our borders under control, and I have been working in the Senate to increase the number of border patrol agents, expand detention facilities and step up enforcement efforts. My bill, AgJOBS, would take another step in the right direction, by reforming the agriculture worker, or H2-A, visa program. Increased border control is important, but we also need to reform our visa programs so workers that farmers and business owners desperately need can come and go legally.

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When 2006 ends, a law will expire that has been very helpful to Idaho: the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act, also known as the Craig-Wyden Bill. Many in rural school districts around the State understand the importance of the financial assistance this law provides, and I have already begun working to secure reauthorization of it. I will continue this effort so Idaho counties where Uncle Sam is the biggest landowner -- and thus without a broad tax base -- can still provide vital services to residents and a high-quality education to the children.

As a member of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, I'll also support efforts to authorize drilling for oil and natural gas in ANWR. The Senate has approved drilling in ANWR several times, the most recently being in the FY 2006 Defense Appropriations bill. However, the ANWR provisions were stripped out of the conference report. The United States must get back in the business of producing energy, because Americans have already shown their dislike for high energy prices in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. This will also help address our reliance on foreign sources of oil, which is, in reality, a national security issue.

In addition, Congress still must pass a budget reconciliation package to rein in the growth of the federal government. Asbestos litigation reform is well past due, and pension reform is also high on the list of priorities for the second session.

The second session of the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress hasn't even begun, but as you can see, we've already got a substantial list of items that need to be resolved. Because of the limitations of space, there are a number of things that I can't cover, although they are no less important to me. Having said that, I hope you won't hesitate to contact me through my website or any one of my offices in Idaho or Washington, D.C. I always appreciate hearing from you.